

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<http://oversight.house.gov>

June 15, 2020

Ms. Christi A. Grimm
Principal Deputy Inspector General
Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Principal Deputy Inspector General Grimm:

The Subcommittee on Government Operations requests that the Office of Inspector General (IG) examine the plans and procedures of the Department of Health and Human Services for returning employees to federal offices in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Federal IGs have played a critical role in overseeing the operations of the federal government throughout the pandemic. Your continued oversight is critical to protect the health and safety of our government's most valuable resource: its federal workforce.

In recent weeks, some departments have begun reopening federal offices and requiring employees to return to their duty stations.¹ The Subcommittee asks that you review whether your department and its managers are employing best practices and existing guidance when deciding whether or when to require federal employees and contractors to return to federal office buildings. The health and safety of federal employees is of paramount concern. We need to ensure that Administration officials are cautious and prudent when requiring federal employees and contractors to return to federal office buildings.

On April 29, 2020, and May 15, 2020, we wrote to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) raising concerns about the Administration's federal reopening guidance. In those letters, we requested a briefing from OMB and OPM staff.² The response we received on June 2, 2020, ignored our briefing request

¹ See, e.g., Letter from Internal Revenue Service Human Capital Officer to Internal Revenue Service Employees, *Face Coverings to Be Required in Internal Revenue Service Facilities and Workplaces* (Apr. 24, 2020) (online at <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/sites/democrats.waysandmeans.house.gov/files/documents/IRS%20PPE%20email.pdf>).

² Letter from Chairman Gerald E. Connolly, Subcommittee on Government Operations, to Michael Rigas, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management (Apr. 29, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2020-04-29.GEC%20to%20Rigas-%20OPM%20re%20Reopening%20Guidance.pdf>); Letter from Chairman Gerald E. Connolly, Subcommittee on

and failed to address concerns raised in our letters regarding the provision of personal protective equipment and coronavirus testing in federal workplaces.³

This Administration's unwillingness to demonstrate sufficient concern about the health and welfare of our federal workforce makes your job even more vital to our nation.

Given the many shortcomings identified in the Administration's reopening guidelines, as well as the Administration's unwillingness to engage in even minimal oversight of its abysmal response to the coronavirus pandemic, we request that you carefully oversee and review your department's actions in this area. Specifically, we ask that you review agreed-upon best practices for safe, healthy, and effective office re-openings from both governmental and non-governmental experts. We request that you use these resources to develop an assessment plan to review your department's office reopening efforts.⁴ This assessment plan could include:

- Methodology to assess whether actions that department officials take to require employees to return to federal offices are based on evidence and research and meet best practices and guidance;
- Baseline metrics on various important indicators that will allow for future examination of department office re-opening plans, including the number of employees who contract the coronavirus;
- Assessment of department access to appropriate volumes of critical resources, including reliable coronavirus tests, personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, soap and warm water, workplace dividers, and disinfectant;
- Assessment of department protocols for when an employee tests positive for coronavirus;
- Evaluation of inter-department collaboration, especially with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, to ensure re-opening plans are consistent with public health and worker safety guidelines; and
- Any additional information or data that will facilitate a thorough assessment of department policies and actions at this critical juncture.

Millions of federal employees and contractors will be affected by the Administration's decisions to return federal employees to federal offices. Our federal workforce has demonstrated that it can continue to work effectively and serve this nation—even in the most difficult and dangerous of circumstances. In return, federal management officials must employ the safest

Government Operations, to Michael Rigas, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management (May 15, 2020) (online at https://connolly.house.gov/uploadedfiles/gec_letter_to_rigas_and_vought_fed_reopening.pdf).

³ Letter from Russell T. Vaught, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget, and Michael Rigas, Acting Deputy Director, Office of Personnel Management, to Chairman Gerald E. Connolly, Subcommittee on Government Operations (June 2, 2020) (online at https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/Connolly_0.pdf).

⁴ Office of Management and Budget and Office of Personnel Management, *Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for Opening Up America Again* (Apr. 26, 2020) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/M-20-23.pdf).

Ms. Christi A. Grimm

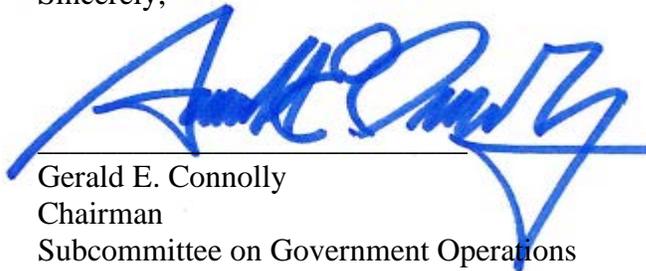
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procedures in determining whether and when employees should return to their offices. We need to ensure that premature or misguided efforts to return to offices will not undercut efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus and put federal employees and their families in danger.

Given the importance of this oversight, we trust it will be made a priority of the office. The health and safety of our more than two million federal workers are at stake. We cannot afford to get this wrong. We look forward to your prompt reply.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman
Subcommittee on Government Operations

cc: The Honorable Jody B. Hice, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations